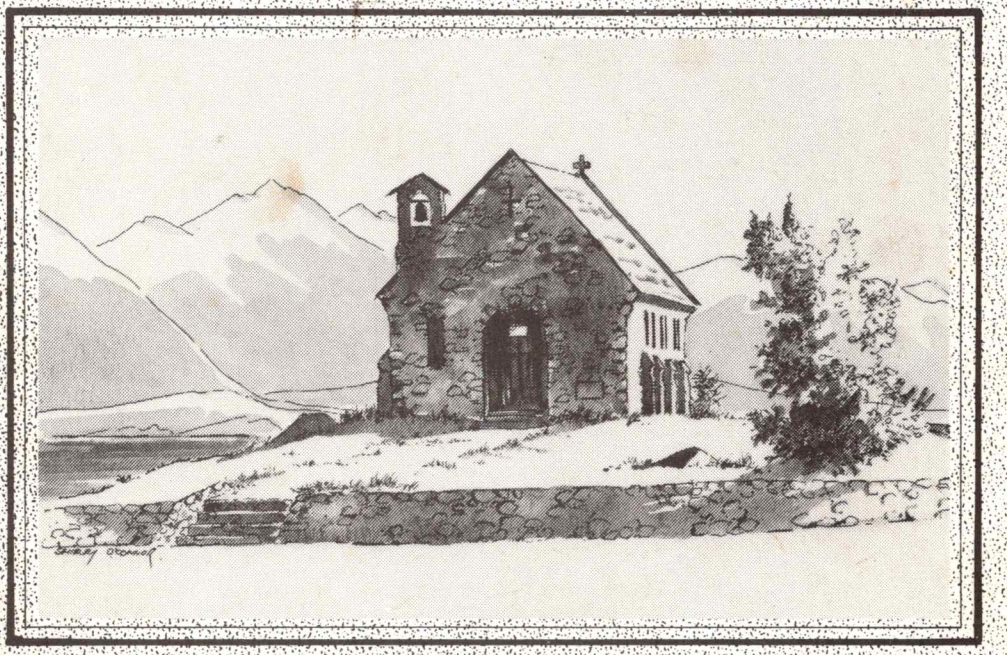
THE STORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

LAKE TEKAPO, NEW ZEALAND



Written by Revd. Peter Hurricks, M.A., B.D.

Drawings by Shirley O'Connor

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to be invited to write the Foreword to this publication that describes the history of this particular church.

My father was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to many different places and I am very touched to be asked to maintain a family link in this way after he had laid the foundation stone 50 years ago.

I only wish I could have visited Lake Tekapo, like he did, and experience for myself the magnificent prospect seen from the altar.

The robustness of the stone construction and the simplicity of the structure reflects the character of the early pioneers who came to Mackenzie Country. It will become in its own right an historic monument symbolising the faith of those who came to New Zealand to create a new life.

I hope that many people will enjoy visiting this beautiful site and be encouraged by its symbolism.

H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester, G.C.V.O.

INTRODUCTION

In a crowded Tokyo shopping centre a young woman sees a poster of the Church of the Good Shepherd and is suddenly filled with the peace and stillness she experienced in that little stone church sitting in the midst of the New Zealand high country.

A woman whose three year old son ran under a car, finds peace and heart's-ease sitting, meditating upon the Cross silhouetted against the snow clad peaks of God's creation.

Somehow the setting and the church combine to speak of God to those who enter and pause in the midst of their busy lives and hectic schedules.

This is the ministry of the Church of the Good Shepherd at Lake Tekapo. A ministry that has spread throughout the world.

This booklet tells something of the story of the building and life of this world famous church.

THE ENVIRONMENT

When the sheep rustler James Mackenzie first crested the Pass that bears his name in the Rollesby ranges in 1855, he beheld a vast, empty, wind blown tussock land. On the northern horizon he saw the procession of high, jagged peaks that were to be known as the Southern Alps and around to the south and east, steep tussock covered ranges. For Mackenzie it was an ideal route to drive his stolen sheep secretly southwards to the Otago lowlands.

To the settlers who quickly followed his discovery, the land was hard and unforgiving. In summer it was hot, dry and windy and in the winter time snow and frost locked the settlers in for months at a time.

The land was held in sprawling pastoral leases from the government. A tough breed of sheep, the merino was brought in thousands and run on these great tracts of tussock. Bullock wagons on dirt tracks painfully hauled the bales of wool down country to the ports and returned with stores and mail.

The first houses were made of cob(1) and thatch with clay floors. There were few trees so building materials had to be hauled in; and in winter there was always the dread of running out of fuel. For man and animals the life was hard. The great snow of 1895 cost one runholder at the top of Lake Tekapo 8,000 sheep out of a flock of 10,000. He was just one of many who suffered from severe weather conditions.

Those who survived these early times knew what it was like to live on a knife edge of existence and it bred in them and their families an independence and a toughness combined with a quiet piety. They knew their only real security rested in the hands of their Maker.

The Church of the Good Shepherd was an attempt to express this pioneering experience in a living church of stone.

THE IDEA

"We need a church that will be a central meeting place not only for the various station-holders and their employees, but also for the many campers and holiday makers. It should be on the lakeside at Tekapo." The speaker was the Revd. W. E. D. Davies and the date was 17th September, 1933. His listeners were Bruce and Gerald Murray and Purcell Hunter-Weston, local runholders. The place was the Takapo House where a Sunday evening service had just been held. At this meeting was born the idea of the Church of the Good Shepherd beside the lake.

From the beginning it was decided that a feature of the church was to be a plate glass window behind the altar. (2) The church was to be sited so that this window would give a view of the mountains and the lake. It was also decided from its inception that the church was to be built, "firstly to the glory of God and secondly, as a memorial to the pioneers of the district". Thus, although it was to be in the keeping of the Anglican Church, it was (and is) freely available to all denominations. The common heritage of the pioneers transcended denominational barriers even at this early stage.

A site on the peninsula near the old Tekapo bridge locality was chosen because it met the requirements of the picture window.

(1) A mixture of mud and tussock.
(2) This idea was first employed in the church at Franz Joseph at the suggestion of Dean Churchill-Julius of Christchurch cathedral.

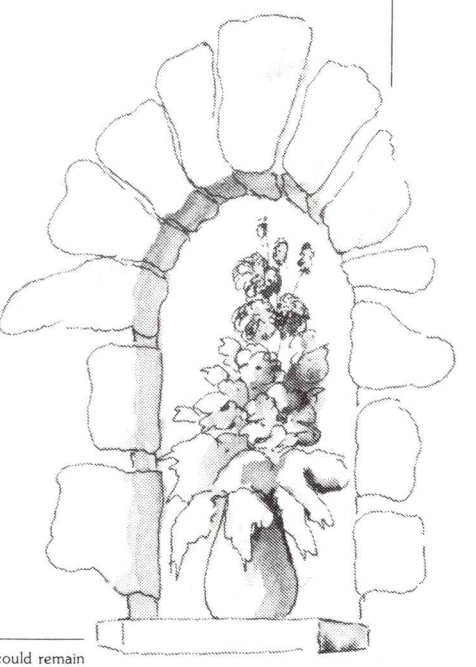
Things were not as simple as the building committee had hoped. As Mr Dick Beauchamp, the secretary, recalls:

> I saw in the Timaru Herald an advertisement for an auction of land at Tekapo. A plan was given and we realised it included the site we wanted for the church. They were pretty hard times and we had no cash to spare. So I rang George Murray and asked him to go and buy. This he did. There were four sections in all and he bought the lot. An eyewitness told me he saw the old man sit there and with a face like a lemon out bid several disgusted fishermen who wanted a handy place for a bach!

It was fortunate that four sections were bought because it was then discovered that the Ministry of Works was planning to raise the level of the lake by thirty feet, submerging the spot they had originally chosen. (3)

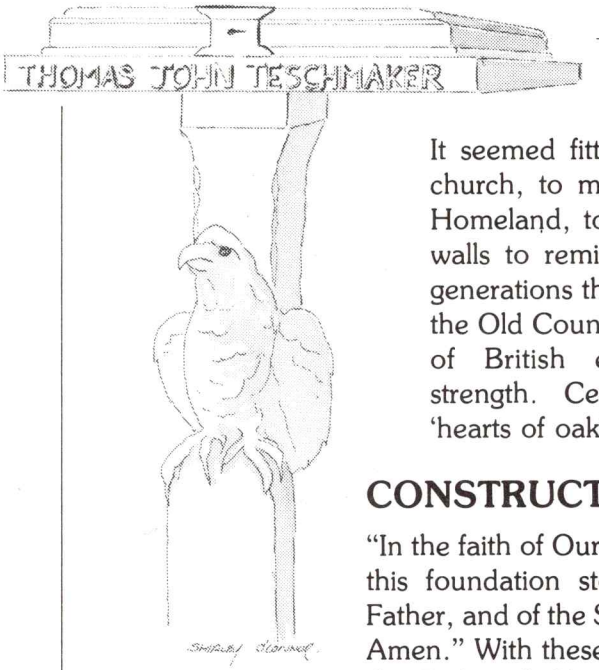
In the meantime Davies in the company of Mr Esmond Goodwin from the Fairlie vestry travelled round the stations of the Mackenzie soliciting support and financial backing for the project. They were met with enthusiastic support despite the hard economic conditions of the depression (4) and the building committee began discussions with Mr Richard Harman, a Christchurch architect. Harman was at that time a young and enterprising architect. He managed to put into his design the feelings and aspirations of the local people.

Harman was asked to design a building which would 'give the impression of quiet strength and simplicity' embodying what were felt to be the essential qualities of the Mackenzie settler. The choice of building material was obviously stone and this was to be gathered from the surrounding countryside. Oak fittings inside were also specified. Again the thinking behind this reveals what the people were trying to express about their forebears and their land.



(3) In 1935 Mr Peter Hope donated a surrounding section so that the church could remain isolated from other buildings and houses.

(4) The cost of the building amounted to six hundred pounds. Most of the fittings were donated in memory of pioneering families and individuals.



As Davies wrote:

> It seemed fitting in a pioneer memorial church, to maintain some link with the Homeland, to have something within its walls to remind the present and future generations that the Pioneers hailed from the Old Country. Oak has been a symbol of British endurance, stability and strength. Certainly the pioneers had 'hearts of oak'.

CONSTRUCTION

"In the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ we place this foundation stone, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." With these words His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester laid the foundation stone. It was shortly after midday, Tuesday, 16th January, 1935. A large crowd of locals, visitors, and church dignatories including Bishop Campbell West-Watson watched as the young Duke carefully cemented in the granite block. The His Lordship the Bishop of Christchurch prayed:

> Here let the true faith and fear of God, with brotherly love, ever abide; and may this place now set apart with prayers, and with the invocation and praise of the most Holy Name, be ever more the Temple of the Most High God; Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

So began the life of the Church of the Good Shepherd.

The contract had been let to local builders, Doug Rodman and Les Loomes. They were instructed to leave the site as undisturbed as possible; rocks on the wall lines were not to be shifted and even the matagouri bushes surrounding the building were to remain untouched. The stone for the outer cladding of the poured concrete walls was to be procured within a radius of five miles.

Mr Jack Miller, a retired stone mason from Christchurch used the lakeside stones and boulders which he hand picked for colour and

quality. Many tons were carried by hand in bags and pipe stretchers from the lakeside to the site. Harman had specified that the stone be left unchipped and in its natural condition; even those used for corners, buttresses and windows. The stone work was not treated to remove lichen 'in the hope that the building would look fifty years old when completed'. The walls were sixteen inches at the base tapering to thirteen inches at the top and inclined inwards so as to give a squat, solid look. Loomes recalls, "Jack was a fine tradesman. He didn't use a line for the stone, it was all done by eye, a straight-edge and a plumb rule".

The timber inside was made of thick beams of red pine. These were soaked for 48 hours in a galvanised iron bath thirty-six feet long filled with a mixture of eleven parts raw linseed oil and one of tar. The roof was laid in split wooden shingles which were not soaked in the same mixture. (5)

The church was completed in eight months and dedicated on Saturday, 3rd August, by His Lordship the Bishop of Christchurch. Unlike other churches in the Anglican communion it was not 'consecrated' as this, it was felt, would take away the inter-denominational character of the church.

THE INTERIOR

People from all round the Mackenzie county were encouraged to give fittings in memory of pioneering members of their family. (6) The overall design of the fittings was in the hands of Harman. In this way despite the multifarious origins of the interior a unity of feeling was kept.

There are a number of interior features that are worthy of special note:

The Altar

The altar is made from one large block of Oamaru stone (a type of limestone). The block was cut to size and carved by a widely known sculptor Frederick George Gurnsey.

(Visitors to Christchurch will have seen the lions on the Bridge of Remembrance and the magnificent reredos behind the high altar in

(5) As a consequence these had to be replaced with slates in 1957.

(6) A list of the original donors can be found in appendix II.

the Cathedral: these are examples of his work which can be found up and down New Zealand, particularly in churches.)

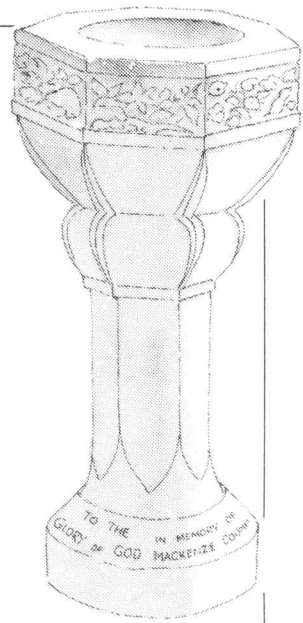
The altar in the Church of the Good Shepherd is notable for the figure of Christ carved on the front panel. It marks a significant departure from all other representations of Jesus as the 'good shepherd'. If anything it is reminiscent of the Eric Gill school of sculpting. Gurnsey succeeded in carving a figure which is in keeping with the Mackenzie high country rather than Victorian sentimentality. The figure of Jesus is depicted in strong clear lines and is shown carrying the lamb firmly under one arm rather than over the shoulders.

The Font

The font is the place where new Christians are baptised. (Traditionally converts were immersed in water; the act symbolising a washing away of the old life and sin and being raised to new life in Christ). It is the place of entry so it is placed near the church door. The font was given in memory of 'all shepherds and station hands'. Gurnsey appropriately chose to decorate it with high country flora and forna: eidelweiss, mountain lilies and keas.

Gurnsey was also responsible for carving the lectern and the stand for the Book of Remembrance, a parchment book containing a complete list of all the original runholders.

The Church is a memorial and is filled with pioneering memories, but it was also dedicated to the 'Glory of God' and so it is not a museum but a living and evolving entity. Like the Mackenzie country itself it retains its past but it is changing.



THE CURRENT SCENE

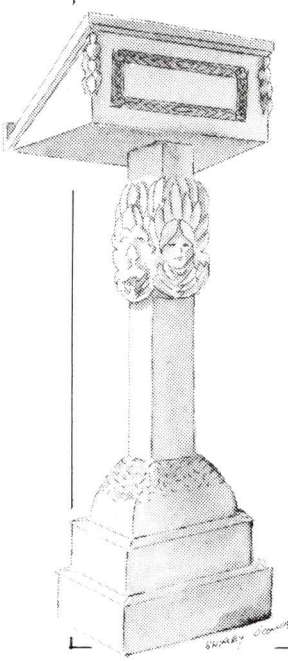
A large glossy bus draws up outside the Church of the Good Shepherd. Out comes a stream of people, Americans, Japanese, Australians, people from all round the world. Cameras click and whirr. Gingerly almost hesitantly they push open the door and go in. Voices hushed, cameras clicking. More people push in behind. Some sit, some just simply stand. Sometimes the view through the windows is calm and beautiful: lake glistening, mountains soaring. Sometimes the water is rough and grey and dark heavy clouds brood over the unseen peaks. For a few brief minutes, schedules, tickets, worries and weariness slip away unnoticed: noise gives way to silence. The bus horn sounds, the spell is broken, pressures return, the bus doors hiss shut, the motor roars and they are gone. The Church remains.

This scene is repeated many times throughout the year. In 1970 concern was voiced in the local paper that 'half a dozen tourist coaches a day' stopped at the church, posing substantial cleaning problems and threat of vandalism. Today that figure would be half a dozen an hour! Such numbers have meant some changes. The most obvious one being the reconstruction of the vestry area to protect the organ and other church equipment. During Christmas and Easter there are as many people outside the church participating in the service as there are inside. Local residents have learnt that one must be early for these services to secure a seat! There were plans in

the 1960s to extend the church by building on a porch and vestry facing the road, but whatever plan was looked at it was realised that any addition would ruin the original conception of 'quiet strength and simplicity'.

The building fabric itself has not been without its problems. The untreated stone which was to give the appearance of being 'fifty years old from the moment it was built' could not last the rigours of the exposed position in a harsh climate. In 1982 moisture seepage through the walls was such that a special chemical water-proofing had to be used and the internal walls redecorated at a cost of $9,000. The cost of cleaning and maintenance is paid for from money received in the donation box in the church.

On Christmas Day, 1979 the Church of the Good Shepherd was part of a live international television link-up showing how Christmas was celebrated around the world. Pictures of the Mackenzie basin, the lake and the Church, were beamed via satellite throughout the Commonwealth and formed part of Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas message. The broadcast without a doubt added to the Church's popularity as a venue for weddings.



Tourists, broadcasts and maintenance are in a way peripheral to the on going life of this church. The heart of the Church of the Good Shepherd was, is, and will continue to be the regular Sunday by Sunday worship. The Church of the Good Shepherd is first and foremost a place of worship where the people of the Mackenzie come to hear the Word of God, to praise Him in song and prayer and receive the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood.

THE CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In the final analysis, what is it that draws people to this humble little church tucked away in the New Zealand high country? The cathedrals of Europe are bigger and more beautiful. The Church of the Good Shepherd boasts no soaring arches and no intricate architecture. It has no relics and no precious works of art. Yet people stop and linger and come away reluctant to go. Why?

In an age of complexity, simplicity is precious. Technological, theological and monetary complexities are woven into lives which need just three simple things: food, shelter and love. A simple stone church perched on a rugged land scape: a simple cross outlined against creation. Shelter and love. God is both Shepherd and Host.

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed;
But yet in love He sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

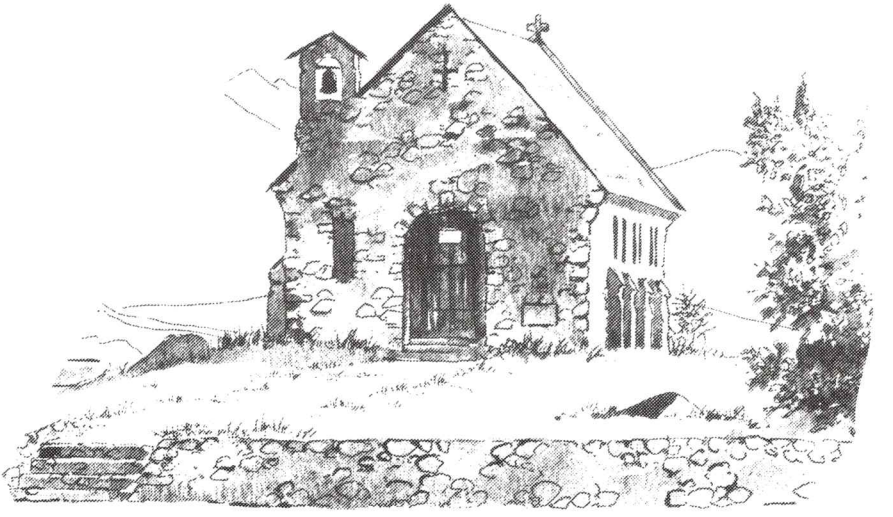
In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
With Thee dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy Cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a Table in my sight;
Thy Unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight
From Thy pure Chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house for ever.

APPENDIX ONE

Members of the building committee, 1935.
Chairman: The Revd. W. E. D. Davies, Vicar.
District Warden: Mr B. N. Murray.
Secretaries: Mr R. R. Beauchamp and C. J. Talbot.
Members: Mr and Mrs Norman Hope, Mrs B. N. Murray, Mr W. G. Hosken, Mr G. G. Murray.
Fairlie Vestry Representatives: A. H. Gillingham, C. J. Talbot, E. Goodwin.
Architect R. S. D. Harman, A.R.I.B.A., F.N.Z.I.A.
Builders: D. Rodman, J. Miller, L. Loomes.



APPENDIX TWO

A list of people and families who had donated fixtures and fittings by the time the church was dedicated. It is not, of course a complete list. The names in inverted commas are the names of the stations (farms).

The Bell: Mr and Mrs Percy Barker, 'Rocky Ridges'.
Font. Mrs and Mrs J. M. H. Tripp, 'Silverton'.
Altar: Frances E. Hope, 'Richmond'.
Altar Cross: Edith E. Ormsby.
Candle Sticks: The Station Hands of the 'Grampians'.
Oak Stand and Book of Remembrance: Mrs John Barker, Mrs Gilbert Grigg, Mrs J. H. Grigg.
Oak Lectern: Mrs Margaret Anniss.
Chalice and Paten: Frances, Charles and Peete Musgrave.
Harmonium: Mr and Mrs W. G. Hosken, 'Simon's Hill'.
Prayer Desk and Seat: Mrs Caroline Bushell.
Altar Rail: H. H. Russell.
Pews: Henry A., Herbert A., and Henry J. Le Cren, Mary Smart, James Preston 'Glen Lyon', N.Z. Alpine Club, Eugenie Hayter 'Rollesby', Lulu Murray 'Godley Peaks', Mr Ogilvie, B. N. Murray, Mr and Mrs F. J. Carter and Mrs Bicknell.

Many people throughout the Mackenzie and surrounding districts gave gifts in kind or cash that enabled the church to be built and furnished. A full list is impossible: the Church of the Good Shepherd is their testimony.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation of the help and encouragement I received from a number of people who helped to make the production of this history possible. Tim Murray of 'Maryburn', the Warden of the Church of the Good Shepherd, for supplying many hitherto unpublished details. Miss Pat Murray amd Miss Faith Gurnsey also helped in providing material.

P.B.H.